

Applicant : Murakami et al.
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Attorney's Docket No.: 16709-004001 / F706US

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1 - 14. (Canceled)

15. (Previously presented) A vehicle sharing system for sharing a fleet of vehicles, comprising:

a plurality of ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;

a computer system in communication with said plurality of ports and programmed to defining a search depth vehicle search group (VSG) for each port in which one or more available vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time for possible allocation to a user at the port, determine a number of vehicles in a first search depth VSG of a first port and, in response thereto, to determine whether additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port; and

means for relocating one or more vehicles from a second port to the first port, upon a determination by said computer system that additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port.

16. (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein each port includes a vehicle parking facility at which one or more vehicles may be parked at any given time.

17. (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein the first search depth VSG further includes vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period based on the search depth.

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18. (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein said means for relocating comprises a tow bar for connecting two vehicles together at said second port such that both vehicles may be transported to the first port by a single driver.

19. (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein:
at least one of the vehicles in the fleet is provided with a carrier hitch receptacle; and
said means for relocating comprises a carrier bracket connectable to the said carrier hitch receptacle of the one vehicle, for carrying a second vehicle.

20. (Previously presented) A system as recited in claim 15, further comprising a port attendant display device coupled for communication with said computer system and adapted for displaying a relocation message to an attendant of the second port.

21. (Previously presented) A method for sharing a fleet of vehicles among one or more users, comprising:

providing a plurality of ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;
providing a central computer in communication with the plurality of ports;
executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer to perform:
step for defining a first vehicle search group (VSG) for a first port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time, and a second VSG for a second port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time;
determining a number of available vehicles in the first VSG; and
based on the number of available vehicles in the first VSG, determining whether additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port; and
relocating one or more vehicles from the second port to the first port, upon a determination by the central computer that additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port.

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22. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer further comprises:
detecting a location of each vehicle in the fleet;
transmitting the location of each vehicle to the central computer; and
determining a number of vehicles within a designated area with respect to the first port.

23. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 22, wherein executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer further comprises determining whether the number of vehicles within the designated area is below a preset value.

24. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein executing a vehicle allocation program at the central computer further comprises determining whether the number of available vehicles in the first VSG is below a preset value.

25. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein relocating the one or more vehicles comprises:
connecting one end of a tow bar to a trailer hitch of a first vehicle and a second end of the tow bar to a trailer hitch of a second vehicle; and
towing the second vehicle with the first vehicle.

26. (Previously presented) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein relocating one or more vehicles comprises:
connecting a carrier bracket to a carrier hitch receptacle of a first vehicle; and
carrying a second vehicle on the carrier bracket.

27 - 30. (Canceled)